

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJ: MAY DAY

REF: STATE 089698 (NOTAL); COLOMBO 1167

1. SUMMARY: UNITED FRONT (UF) SUPPORTERS STAGED LARGE MAY DAY PROCESSION AND RALLY ON GALLE FACE GREEN. SAME OLD RHETORIC. UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP) WAS ALLOWED TO HOLD MEETING AT TOWN HALL BUT NO PROCESSION. UNP LEADER J.R. JAYEWARDENE PLEDGED CONTINUED DEFIANCE OF "ILLEGAL AND DICTATORIAL LAWS". OTHER SMALL MARXIST GROUPS HELD MEETINGS. SECURITY FORCES WERE MUCH IN EVIDENCE BUT THERE WAS NO THREAT TO PUBLIC ORDER. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH RED AND RED AND BLUE BANNERS FLYING, WITH ANTI-UNP SLOGANS FILLING THE AIR, AND WITH HOT SUN BEATING DOWN, UF PARTIES -- SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP), LANKA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY (TROTSKYITE LSSP), AND COMMUNIST PARTY, MOSCOW-WING (CP/M) -- CELEBRATED MAY DAY WITH CONSIDERABLE NOISE AND NO VIOLENCE. FOLLOWING THREE HOUR PROCESSION DURING SEVERAL ANTI-AMERICAN SLOGANS WERE HEARD NEAR EMBASSY, UF SUPPORTERS, PERHAPS 45,000 STRONG, AMASSED ON GALLE FACE GREEN TO HEAR SPEECHES BY
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PRIME MINISZUR BANDARANAIKE (SLFP), FINANCE MINISTER

PERERA (LSSP), HOUSING MINISTER KEUNEMAN (CP/M), AND TRADE MINISTER ILLANGARATNE (SLFP). ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THRUST OF SPEECHES WAS THAT UNP IS INVOLVED IN "CONSPIRACIES" TO TOPPLE GOVERNMENT BECAUSE UF HAS DEALT DEATH BLOW TO CAPITALISTS. PRIME MINISTER ALSO DWELLED ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF HER GOVERNMENT AND REVIEWED RECENT CRACKDOWNS ON UNP AND INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPERS (SUN) GROUP.

3. OF INTEREST IS FACT THAT PRIME MINISTER'S SON ANKCA LED SLFP SECTION OF PARADE WHICH CAME FIRST, WHILE DAUGHTER SUNETHRA AND SON-IN-LAW KUMAR RUPASINGHE LED SEPARATE "JANAVEGAYA" GROUP WHICH MARCHED WITHIN SLFP GROUP BUT UNDER SEPARATE BANNER.

4. UNP WAS FINALLY ISSUED PERMIT BY POLICE TO HOLD MEETINGS AT TOWN HALL IN COLOMBO AND IN THREE TOWNS OUTSIDE COLOMBO. PLANNED UNP PROCESSION FROM COLOMBO'S SUGATHADASA STADIUM TO TOWN HALL WAS NOT ALLOWED. DURING TOWN HALL MEETING OPPOSITION LEADER J.R. JAYEWARDENE CLAIMED UNP WAS NOT INTERESTED IN LAW-BREAKING OR TOPPLING GOVERNMENT THROUGH TERRORISM. HE SAID, HOWEVER, "WE WILL AT COST OF OUR LIVES DEFY ILLEGAL AND DICTATORIAL LAWS". SURPRISE GUEST AT UNP MEETING WAS FORMER ARMY COMMANDER AND NOW MP, RICHARD UDUGAMA, WHO RECENTLY RESIGNED FROM SLFP AND CROSSED OVER TO OPPOSITION AS INDEPENDENT. ACCORDING TO OUR ESTIMATES, PERHAPS UP TO 30,000 PEOPLE ATTENDED THIS RALLY IN SPITE OF UF MONOPOLY OF CTB BUSES TO TRANSPORT ITS OWN SUPPORTERS AND GSL BAN ON TRANSPORTING PERSONS BY TRUCK.

5. MEETINGS OF OTHER MARXIST GROUPS INCLUDED BALA TAMPOE'S LSSP/REVOLUTIONARY AT COLOMBO'S HYDE PARK; MAHAJANA EKSATH PERAMUNA (MEP) MEETING AT DEMATAGODA, WHICH WAS ADDRESSED BY DINESH GUNAWARDENE, SON OF LATE MINISTER OF UNP GOVERNMENT PHILIP GUNAWARDENE; SHANMUGATHASAN'S COMMUNIST PARTY, PEKING-WING (CP/P) AT CALLE; AND CP/M HARD-LINERS UNDER DR. WICKREMASINGHE AT MATARA.

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6. GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PRESS GAVE EXTENSIVE PUBLICITY TO UF ACTIVITIES BUT ALSO CARRIED ACCOUNTS OF UNP MEETING ON FRONT PAGE.

7. POLICE AND ARMED FORCES WERE ON FULL ALERT, WITH RESERVES BEING BROUGHT INTO COLOMBO. ARMY PATROLS WERE HIGHLY VISIBLE. OTHER THAN FEW MINOR INCIDENTS, MAINLY

ROCK-THROWING, ALL WAS RELATIVELY PEACEFUL. UF LEADERS
CLEARLY WORKED TO SEE THAT NOTHING UNTOWARD TOOK PLACE
THAT MIGHT HAVE SPOILED THEIR BIG DAY AND RUINED THEIR
OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE THEY CAN STILL DRUM UP CONSIDERABLE
SUPPORT. UNP ALSO CURBED ITS PLANNED PROGRAM IN ORDER TO CONFORM
TO GOVERNMENT'S RESTRICTIONS.
VAN HOLLEN

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